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**State of Hawaii
Charter School Review Panel**

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March 23, 2011

To: Senator Jill Tokuda, Chair
Education Committee
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice-Chair
Education Committee
Members
From: Ruth Tschumy, Chair
Charter School Review Panel
Re: Hearing on HB 159 H.D.1
Rm. 225

Aloha Senator Tokuda, Senator Kidani and Members,

Good afternoon,

The Charter School Review Panel appreciates your continuing efforts on behalf of Hawaii's charter schools and all of Hawaii's children. In schools, one size, one educational philosophy, one mission, one curriculum simply does not fit all children. In Hawaii, there's a rich mixture of different types of schools – public schools, public charter schools, independent schools, Catholic schools, parochial schools and more. So families in Hawaii are able to find the right match between their child and the right school. Thank you for providing this, and I'm pleased charter schools contribute to this robust mixture of schools.

First, thank you for considering needs-based facilities funding for charter schools. One charter school very close to here, your neighbor Voyager Public Charter School, rents very modest facilities and pays \$500,000 in yearly rent. The panel will enthusiastically participate in a new task force to come up with a formula for needs-based facilities funding for charter schools that is separate from per-pupil funding.

Second, and here I'm giving my personal views because the panel doesn't meet until tomorrow, and under Sunshine, I'm unable to discuss this with members – I'd like to discuss what I believe is a "weak link" in the charter school system – the Local School Boards. Please understand, and I'd like to emphasize this, charter schools' local school boards are comprised of dedicated people who give of their time and talent to the school. However, statute (§302B-7) states that local school boards are the "autonomous governing body of the school," and some LSB's simply do not understand their responsibilities and/or have the skill-set to oversee an educational institution

that's also a multi-million dollar "business." Whereas, statute provides that the panel oversees charter schools, who oversees local school boards, especially since they are "autonomous"?

While the panel is not eager to add to its overflowing plate of responsibilities, it has discussed the need for training for LSB members and monitoring of their activities. Both the administrative office and the network are interested in and have provided several training sessions.

I believe it would help the panel if added to its duties would be the responsibility to ensure that local school boards are fulfilling their responsibilities, and should a local school board not be fulfilling its oversight responsibilities, after working with the LSB, the panel be allowed to require the LSB to undergo mandatory board training and, in extreme cases, require the LSB to be reconstituted – i.e. current members would step down and new elections would be held as prescribed in §302B-7.

In my view, the primary responsibility of the LSB is to ensure its school is using state funds wisely, effectively and transparently in accomplishing its educational goals and mission and that the school is adhering to best practices in all matters. The panel would like to be able to ensure that this is happening.

Thank you.